

CLERGYMAN OR?

Douglas T. Smith
Chaplain (CPT) USA
5-16-C22-73-1
11 May 73

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INTRODUCTION

Sometime in June 1971 at one of our larger Army Posts, a young, dynamic but misguided chaplain by some means or other put together two position papers on the role of the chaplain in the army today.¹ Disregarding the forum of the chaplain's and disregarding the Chain of Command, this young chaplain presented "his" papers to the Commanding General of this Post. Upon reading the papers the Commanding General was favorably impressed and immediately ordered the ideas contained in the papers be put into operation immediately.

The ideas centered around a new radical program for chaplains in a garrison type situation. It was to become the new Functionalization/Utilization Program for Chaplains. It was radical because it called for doing away with the traditional role of the chaplain as a 'Unit Chaplain,' It was also radical because it called for the working of chaplains in fields that were not religious as well as fields that demanded his full time work without consideration being given to his special qualification as a religious leader.

Needless to say chaos resulted. In typical fashion the Command Chaplain and his staff "jumped through their skins" in an all out effort to implement a "Functionalization/Utilization" plan for the chaplains without any consideration being given to whether or not the plan had

¹Herman Keizer, Jr., Position Papers to Commanding General, Fort Carson, Colorado, 1971.

merit, or whether or not a partial implementation on a trial basis would be more feasible.

I say chaos resulted for a number of reasons: (1) The plan was untried, completely new and unintelligible, not only to commanders but also to chaplains who were the primary targets of this new plan. (2) Commanders were not sufficiently prepared to relinquish the traditional role of the Unit Chaplains. (3) Chaplains, for a variety of reasons were not ready to experiment with a program that had been more or less "forced down their throats." The resulting spirit of lack of cooperation and at times downright hostility to the program was something to behold. In this writer's opinion, a program with some merit was doomed to failure from the start simply because it was not thought out properly and was implemented prematurely.

As a result of the new plan, every chaplain on the Post, regardless of the slot he filled, was to act as a specialist in some field. To give some idea of the ramification of this specialist program I have enclosed as Appendix A a chart of the specialties.

Where does this leave the chaplains in the military? Where does this leave the chaplains role as a religious leader? If we were to follow the foregoing Functional/Utilization Program as envisioned at this particular post, the chaplains role would be one of a humanistic, non-religious, sectarian specialist without any reference to his religious nature or his role as a religious leader. Therefore, there is a necessity today to examine the chaplain's role so as to distinguish it from that which is his and that which be its very nature belongs to someone in a different profession. Needless to say, to try in the

scope of this paper to examine all of the different specialties and their relationship to the chaplaincy would be a task beyond our present capabilities.

Having pointed out the need, let us just examine one part of one of the specialties. Let us examine the idea of pastoral counseling since this is the major field in which chaplains are engaged at present.

Some chaplains believe that we must be involved in every type of counseling simply because the people of whom we are speaking are our parishioners, who are coming to us in need. It is almost like saying that when one has a toothache and doesn't know what to do about it he can come to the chaplain and be cured. My contention however is that there is a special dimension to pastoral counseling that distinguishes it from other types of counseling and it is precisely because of this dimension that we are equipped to handle the counseling case. In the event that it is outside the realm of the "perspective of faith" and is merely a "non-pastoral" type of counseling that is called for, then we are treading on dangerous grounds when we do not leave this work to the professionals. The question then arises, "What is Pastoral Counseling?"

I

WHAT IS PASTORAL COUNSELING?

The topic of "pastoral counseling" is an illusive one. First of all, there is quite a bit of controversy about the nature of "counseling" itself--where does it stand on the continuum stretching from advice-giving to psychoanalysis? Second, what exactly is pastoral counseling? What roles of the clergyman or religious does it embrace? Finally, more and more clergymen and religious are engaged in counseling and psychotherapy outside traditional "religious" settings; their attitudes, techniques and even appearance give no hint of their religious vocation. Is this pastoral counseling?

Perhaps the best way to approach this elusive subject is to center attention on the pastoral counselor himself. We will begin with a consideration of how pastoral counseling differs from counseling done by other people. From there we can move to answer two other questions: how does pastoral counseling differ from other pastoral work, and what personal qualities are necessary for successful pastoral counseling?

Leroy Aden wonders what is the distinctive mark of pastoral counseling. In subject matter, the interviews often seem the same as those conducted by secular counselors. Also, the pastoral counselor may at times employ the same

techniques--reflection, interpretation, etc., as used by a "non-pastoral" counselor. Finally, Aden explains, we cannot limit pastoral counseling to a particular office in the Church.² Basing his ideas on the work of Seward Hiltner, Aden decides that the key to pastoral counseling is "Christian Perspective." In order to include religious counselors outside Christianity, it is vital to broaden this phraseology. We would say, therefore, that pastoral counseling differs from that done by other counselors in its perspective of faith.

Aden explains this perspective in response to the three pivotal struggles of man's existence: the problem of finitude, the problem of alienation and the problem of guilt. Although many schools of psychotherapy consider the problem of man in these or similar terms, Aden claims that the pastoral counselor has the deepest solutions to these three problems in his perspective of faith. Consequently, what primarily distinguishes pastoral counseling from other kinds is this added dimension in the vocation and ideals of the counselor--namely, that the ultimate questions facing each man find their most satisfying solutions in religious faith. Although pastoral counseling may often resemble other kinds of counseling when the conversation-content of particular interviews is examined or when one looks at the techniques employed by the counselor, it differs from all other kinds of counseling chiefly in the perspective of faith that is at the center of the counselor's motivation and attitude.³

Without this religious perspective, we cannot speak of "pastoral" counseling. Although we certainly do not equate pastoral counseling with preaching or catechizing, the religious aspect must be present, if not in each interview

²Leroy Aden, Pastoral Counseling as Christian Perspective (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 163-166.

³Ibid., p. 175.

or even many interviews, at least at the foundation of the counselor's approach. Godin addresses himself to the problem of religious people counseling without a religious approach. He speaks primarily of priests, but for our purposes we can extend what he says to all those who would be considered as "pastoral" counselors. He writes:

As can be seen, any confusion, as well as separation between the sacramental and psychological aspects of pastoral work involves a deadly compromise of the true relation of Christianity to mental health. Both aspects go together; once belief in the efficacy of the priest's sacramental actions has been abandoned, and psychological skills he may have acquired will simply make him into a rival of the psychotherapist and even, in certain cases where his training has been inadequate, into a real "sourcerer's apprentice."⁴

In summary, then, we can point to the perspective of faith as the distinguishing feature of pastoral counseling. Whether what goes under the name of "pastoral counseling" refers to simple advice or psychotherapy involving a real personality-change, what is significant is the religious perspective of the counselor. This perspective need not intrude in every interview, but should be evident to the client that the counseling he receives has the flavor of religious faith and vocation within it.

A realization of the centrality of faith to pastoral counseling logically leads to our second point: how does pastoral counseling differ from other pastoral or strictly religious activities?

Clergymen and religious perform many functions that, at least in some aspects, resemble counseling. Within a single day, the average parish priest may visit several elderly

⁴ Andre Godin, The Pastor as Counselor (New York: Holt Reinhart and Winston, 1965), p. 25.

people, teach a class in "maturity" or "responsibility" to a group of teenagers, console the family of a newly-deceased parishoner, hear confessions (with a certain amount of "spiritual direction") in a nearby convent, give marriage-instructions to a young couple just engaged, and collect some thoughts for a Sunday sermon. Which of these activities can be called "pastoral counseling?" Is counseling a general term covering all pastoral activity dealing with individuals or small groups of parishoners? Does pastoral counseling refer only to interviews with a single parishoner in which the goal is personality transformation or, at least, last-ditch support? In other words, does pastoral counseling refer only to psychotherapy in a religious atmosphere, or does it embrace a wider scope of pastoral activity, including work with groups, in which the religious person affords guidance, instruction and even friendship?

Yet, the clergyman has a vocation that far transcends counseling. This vocation centers on announcing by word and way of life the incredible things God has done and promised for the human race. (Cf. Ephesians 3:8-12) In preaching and teaching, the religious person explains the true reasons for hope that all men faced with alienation and death can come toward. Moreover, in the sacramental apostolate, the clergyman brings about in a tangible way the union of God and man that is the source of all man's hope and strength. We noticed earlier how Godin stresses that the pastoral counselor remain within his vocation. If he strays into the area of non-religious counseling--especially without sufficient training--he can do great harm. Here we might add that in so doing he would overlook and let slip by the immeasurable good he could and should be doing in his

apostolic vocation. The quality most necessary, then, to the religious viewpoint of pastoral counseling is a real dedication to one's primary vocation--a share in the work of the apostles in announcing and helping to achieve the Kingdom of God with men. Counseling is a vital tool to the build-up of this kingdom, but without the preaching ministry and public worship this kingdom cannot be established and an apostolic vocation is wasted.

Whereas we eliminate depth-analysis and psychotherapy from ordinary pastoral counseling, we cannot, on the other hand, make the term pastoral counseling include all pastoral activity. Curran gives a definition of counseling that we should apply to an understanding of the religious' work in this area:

Counseling is, therefore, a definite relationship where through the counselor's sensitive understanding and skillful responses, a person objectively surveys the past and present factors which enter into his personal confusions and conflicts and, at the same time, reorganizes the emotional reactions so that he not only chooses better ways to reach his reasonable goals, but has sufficient confidence, courage and moderation to act on these choices.⁵

Two conclusions are evident from this definition. First, pastoral counseling demands a different relationship with parishoners than the relationship of preacher to congregation, celebrant to people at Mass, etc. It is a relationship that implies interaction--usually conversation--in which the counselor shows acceptance and understanding of particular areas of conflict, and the counselees, individually or in a group, feel free to examine causes and possible solutions to these personal conflicts. In short, the relationship is one of trust and respect that allows for

⁵Charles A. Curran, Counseling in Catholic Life and Education (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 23.

personal growth and change on the part of the counselee(s). The second conclusion from Curran's definition is that, depending on the clergyman's attitudes and skills, this counseling relationship may exist in many areas of pastoral activity. Visits with shut-in parishoners can work toward new attitudes of interest and hope, pre-marital "instructions" might begin new insights into personal readiness for marriage, new self-understanding and new realizations of the need for growth and change. Even pastoral work with groups--inquiry classes, CCD programs for teenagers, etc.--can become group-counseling if the clergyman or religious can develop a relationship of understanding and insight among the group in which areas of personal conflict can be examined and motivation for change and growth begun.

We can, therefore, point to the distinctive relationship of counseling as the chief quality that distinguishes pastoral counseling from other pastoral work. The role of the clergyman, as Thomas Willson indicates, is not so much to give instruction but to develop an atmosphere wherein those he "counsels" can honestly look at their problems and resolutely work toward growth and change.

We have looked briefly at both sides of pastoral counseling, at the necessity for a perspective of faith and the necessity for establishing a relationship different from other pastoral relationships. What personal qualities can we point to as necessary in this work of pastoral counseling?

Necessary qualities for the pastoral counselor fall under two headings: qualities necessary for successful counseling and also qualities necessary for the religious perspective essential to pastoral counseling.

Foremost among the qualities necessary for the pastoral counselor is knowledge of self. The clergyman must be aware of his own personality, its areas of strength and its areas of weakness especially with regard to interpersonal relationships. Sometimes what goes by the name of pastoral counseling is merely the satisfaction of the "counselor's" personal needs--for attention, affection etc.,--to the detriment of the client. Self-knowledge must be honest enough to recognize areas of immaturity within the counselor and ways that these can be remedied without harm to parishoners. Secondly, the counselor needs knowledge of human nature; the stages of personality development, ways of getting an understanding of the real problems of clients, hints for noticing deeper psychic problems that he cannot handle and the resources available in his area for help for more disturbed parishoners.

Second, the pastoral counselor needs personal qualities that will help him build a truly therapeutic relationship. Among these qualities is an ability to accept the parishoner who comes with a problem. This acceptance implies a real understanding of how the client feels about his troubles--insight into the confusion and frustration he might feel--plus the ability to project this acceptance and understanding in the relationship with the client. This acceptance implies also, as a practical skill, the ability to listen. Finally, to establish a truly therapeutic relationship, the counselor needs the ability to channel the conversation, to use his comments to subtly direct the client to new insights into his character and to new possibilities within himself and in his environment for change. Sometimes it is therapeutic just to have a clergyman or religious to pour out one's troubles to; more often this therapy lasts but a short time. Unless the counselor can help the client work toward some change, he is not helping to the fullest possible extent.

II

THE MODERN ROLE OF PASTORAL COUNSELING

There are other more modern views of exactly what the role of the pastor is in counseling. Many of these more modern views would consider any type of counseling as Pastoral Counseling simply because it was a man of the cloth who was doing the counseling. It is precisely for this reason that I have tried to emphasize the religious nature of counseling as a prerequisite for pastoral counseling.

To emphasize the need in counseling for a perspective of faith on the part of the counselor and/or the counselee and/or the problem itself, it should suffice to examine Canon Law and its description of the role of the priest. Canon Law defines a pastor as a "priest or moral person upon whom a parish is conferred in his own right with the care of souls (*cura animarum*)...."

With this emphasis on spiritual nature of his role it is difficult to see how chaplains can justify the immense amount of time spent in counseling individuals on purely non-religious matters, matters lacking a perspective of faith, matters better left to those who are trained and more qualified in their fields. If the legitimation for chaplains in the military to do this type of counseling is to justify their chaplain's role in the military on the grounds that they have nothin else to do, then I must say

emphatically that now is the time to examine and reexamine the role of the chaplain to the point where we can truly be men of God dealing with men within the realm of this perspective of faith.

In conclusion, I feel now is the time to examine everything the chaplain does and everything he is expected to do whether in the traditional role of the chaplain or this new specialized role and upon examination and evaluation bring all of these duties within the realm of the perspective of faith.

APPENDIX A

I

<u>Specialization</u>	<u>No. of Chaplains</u>
Crisis Intervention (AWOL, Suicide, etc)	1
Hospital	2
HELP Program	1
Inter & Intra-Community Relations	1
Coffee Houses (2)	1
Visitation-Family Program, On Post	2
Off Post	3
Drug Scene, Alcoholics Anonymous	1
Correctional Institutions	2
Youth Program	2
Workshops (Chaplain & Community)	1
Moral Heritage Series	4
Retreats	6
Family Life (Counseling, Family, Marriage Enrichment, etc)	4
Administration	1
Programing/Volar Training	1
Budgeting	1
Supply/Facilities	2
Special Project Coordination	1
Public Relations & Publicity	1
Contemporary Worship	1
Religion & Arts	3
Evangelism	1
Parish Activity Program - Catholic	1
Protestant	1
Jewish	1
Religious Education	3
Troop Chaplains (Major time given to working with troops)	10

APPENDIX A

II

Liaison Chaplains to Organizations 1 chaplain each to:

- USO
- EM Council
- Racial Harmony Council
- Officers Wives Club
- First Four Wives Club
- Youth Activities Club
- Council of Churches

It must be noted that some of the Chaplains were given two or perhaps three specialties where there was an overlap.

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